

Headquarters Military Traffic Management Command

News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MTMC begins discharge of ship flotilla on the Black Sea

BURGAS, BULGARIA – Over the next week, the Military Traffic Management Command will be completing the largest multi-ship contingency movement since the Kosovo conflict of mid-1999.

Beginning today (April 31), three vessels will be unloading a Kosovo peacekeeping task force composed of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) and 3rd Infantry Division at Burgas, Bulgaria.

Unloading of 774 pieces of the MV Merlin began at the Black Sea port April 31.

The MV Project Arabia and MV Skandenborg are scheduled to arrive within the next week.

MTMC loaded all three ships in early April in Beaumont, Texas.

The vessel discharge will be led by MTMC's 953rd Transportation, Co., Piraeus, Greece.

Burgas is the preferred port for vehicles into Kosovo because it is considered a stable country for Americans to work in safety, said Rick Shilby, a MTMC operations officer.

"We are not threatened in Bulgaria," said Shilby.

In addition, Shilby said a support team of Bulgarian military and civilian workers reduces the need for a large American presence.

"We're getting the job done with 15 people," said Shilby.

The multiple vessels were required because of the small size of the Burgas port, he said.

"In a larger port, we could have gotten the job done with a single vessel," said Shilby.

"The key is flexible operations.

"We can master the situation no matter what."

In all, over 1,000 pieces of cargo are moving on the three ships, said Ken Pendergraft, chief of operations, 596th Transportation Group, Beaumont.

The ships' cargoes include wheeled and tracked vehicles, containers, and helicopters – AH-64 Apaches, UH-60 Blackhawks, OH-58 Kiowas, and the huge twin-rotor CH-47 Chinooks.

Warfighters were impressed.

“To my amazement, they made it all fit,” said Capt. John Hall, 3rd Infantry Division liaison officer to the port.

Similar comments came from Capt. Tom Fortunato, assistant division transportation officer for the 101st.

“Some of the deck heights looked lower than the height of our helicopters,” said Fortunato, “but everything went right in.”

“Top to bottom, left to right, there sure wasn’t much space left over though – but then I guess that’s what a good stow plan is supposed to do.”